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Present Perfect

Alexandra Teague

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ALEXANDRA TEAGUE

Present Perfect

My students understand better
if I draw a timeline—horizon

with two ends, shorthand
for anything short of infinity.

I mark the brief rules of past,
present, future; arc a line

linking the past and now: the tense
with a name so lovely

and misleading we'd all like
to describe (stepping out

onto my third-floor landing;
pigeons swooping over chimneys

like pigeons in every time; the hills
massed into lilac clouds; the vertigo

of sky opening at eye level;
scattered lights of lives

carrying on their private
anchorage) something entirely

and not-that-much different
from perfection. *As I have lived*

*all my life in this world, and still
it surprises me. Why not*

*I lived in this world? Gratified
each time someone answers,*

*In the second, you lived
in the past, but you're standing*

up there in the present, too, alive.